

Tuesday, 21 September 2021

## AFL supporter bases boom in 2020/21 as lockdowns keep people at home and 'glued' to the action on TV

The Sydney Swans have again topped the annual Roy Morgan AFL supporter ladder as the only club with over 1 million supporters. The Swans now have 1.031 million supporters, an increase of 27,000 supporters (+2.7%) on a year ago according to the 2021 annual Roy Morgan AFL club supporters survey.

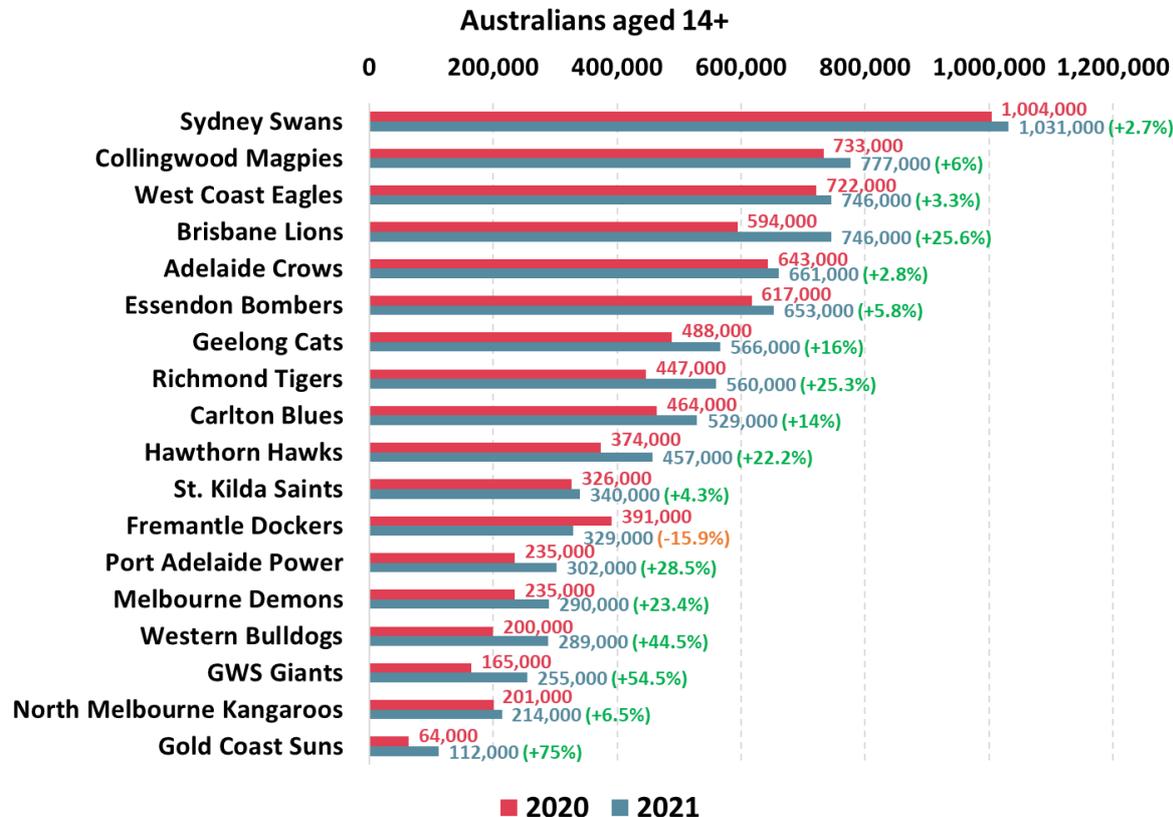
Although the last 18 months have been the most complicated in the history of the AFL with changing restrictions and border closures upending scheduling and sending clubs all over the country, often to play in empty stadiums without any spectators, they have proved a boon for club support.

Almost all the AFL's 18 clubs experienced a rise in support during the year to June 2021 compared to a year earlier and some of the biggest increases have come for teams enjoying success during the last two years. The clubs to experience the largest rise in support include Grand Finalists the **Western Bulldogs** and **Melbourne**, 2019-2020 Premiers **Richmond** and two of the most consistent performers during 2020 and 2021 the **Brisbane Lions** and **Port Adelaide**.

### Over 8.8 million Australians now support an AFL club, up over 1.3 million on a year ago

Although COVID-19 has played havoc with scheduling throughout the last two years there are now more people than ever before, 8,857,000, expressing support for an AFL club, an increase of 1,335,000 (+17.7%) on a year ago. In addition, there are 7,580,000 Australians who watched an AFL match on TV, down 81,000 (-1.1%) on a year ago.

### AFL Club Supporter Ladder 2021



**Source:** Roy Morgan Single Source, July 2019-June 2020, n=54,279 and July 2020-June 2021 n=64,973.  
**Base:** Australians 14+.

## Expansion clubs GWS Giants & Gold Coast Suns have largest increases in support in 2021

The two expansion clubs who joined the AFL around a decade ago experienced the largest increases in support during the COVID-interrupted seasons of 2020/21. Support for the **GWS Giants** increased 90,000 (+54.5%) to 255,000 while support for the **Gold Coast Suns** was up 48,000 (+75%) to 112,000.

Despite the impressive increases for the **Giants** and **Suns** these two clubs remain amongst the three least supported clubs in the AFL.

This year's two Grand Finalists are almost level-pegging in terms of support with **Melbourne** having 290,000 supporters, up 55,000 (+23.4%) on a year ago, just ahead of the **Western Bulldogs** on 289,000, but following a larger increase of 89,000 (+44.5%) compared to 2020.

**Melbourne** and the **Western Bulldogs** are two of only three clubs in Victoria to have fewer than 300,000 supporters and will be hoping a Grand Final victory on Saturday delivers them not only a Premiership, but a sustained increase in supporters. **Melbourne** is the club with the longest Premiership drought of any club in the AFL having not won a Flag since 1964 – 57 years ago.

Two-time defending Premier **Richmond** has also been a big winner over the last year following their success on the field with 560,000 supporters, an increase of 113,000 (+25.3%) on a year ago.

However, the biggest increase in supporter numbers over the last year goes to the **Brisbane Lions** who added an exceptional 152,000 supporters (+25.6%) to a total of 746,000 to be in equal third place overall with the **West Coast Eagles**, up 24,000 (+3.3%). The **Brisbane Lions** were one of the biggest beneficiaries of the COVID-19 impacted 2020 season with a majority of AFL matches in 2020 played in their home State – including the 2020 AFL Grand Final.

Despite a disappointing year on the field and finishing with a record low ladder position of 17<sup>th</sup>, it is again **Collingwood** which is easily the most widely supported Victorian club with 777,000 supporters, an increase of 44,000 (+6%) on a year ago.

### AFL Supporter Conversion to Membership Rates

	<u>% of supporters who are members</u>	<u>Roy Morgan Supporter Numbers</u>	<u>Official 2021 AFL Club Memberships*</u>
North Melbourne Kangaroos	21.7%	214,000	46,357
Richmond Tigers	18.8%	560,000	105,084
Port Adelaide Power	18.7%	302,000	56,532
Melbourne Demons	18.3%	290,000	53,188
Gold Coast Suns	17.4%	112,000	19,460
Hawthorn Hawks	16.9%	457,000	77,079
St. Kilda Saints	16.4%	340,000	55,802
Western Bulldogs	16.1%	289,000	46,541
Carlton Blues	15.4%	529,000	81,302
Fremantle Dockers	15.3%	329,000	50,342
West Coast Eagles	14.3%	746,000	106,422
Essendon Bombers	12.5%	653,000	81,662
Geelong Cats	12.4%	566,000	70,293
GWS Giants	11.8%	255,000	30,185
Collingwood Magpies	10.6%	777,000	82,527
Adelaide Crows	9.1%	661,000	60,232
Brisbane Lions	5.4%	746,000	40,289
Sydney Swans	4.9%	1,031,000	50,144
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>8,857,000</b>	<b>1,113,441</b>

\*Full AFL Membership Figures available at:

<https://www.afl.com.au/news/659242/2021-afl-club-membership-breaks-all-time-record>

## North Melbourne, Richmond, Port Adelaide and Melbourne are best at converting supporters

Although it is no surprise to see the traditionally well-supported clubs such as the **Sydney Swans**, **West Coast** and **Collingwood** at the top of the overall AFL club supporter ladder, a key metric for AFL clubs is their ability to convert their latent supporters into financial members that directly benefit the clubs.

Despite many members not being able to attend matches during 2020-21 [AFL club memberships increased by 12% in 2021 with a record of over 1.1 million](#) Australians taking out memberships. The table below ranks clubs based on how effective they are at converting their supporters into financial members based on dividing the (official AFL club memberships divided by Roy Morgan supporter numbers) x 100.

On this important metric it is the supporters of Wooden Spoons **North Melbourne** who have proven to be the most loyal to their club despite finishing last for the first time in nearly fifty years and is the only club converting over 20% of their supporters into members.

Recent three-time Premiers **Richmond**, which is one of only two clubs with over 100,000 paid-up members, comes in second with an excellent conversion rate of 18.8% of its supporters into members. 2020 'Minor' Premiers **Port Adelaide** is in third place converting an impressive 18.7% of its supporters into members just ahead of 2021 'Minor' Premiers **Melbourne** with a conversion rate of 18.3%.

Also converting supporters into members at a rate of over one-in-six is one of the newest clubs in the league the **Gold Coast Suns** (17.4% conversion rate) and the most successful club of the AFL era **Hawthorn** (16.9%).

## Julian McCrann, Industry Communications Director, Roy Morgan, says despite the challenges of running an AFL season during the COVID-19 pandemic the fans are jumping on board at record levels with over 8.8 million Australians now supporting an AFL club:

*"The last 18 months have been very tough for footy supporters with limited opportunities for many to attend matches, however that hasn't hurt the club support which has soared to a record high. In 2021 a record of 8.86 million Australians expressed support for at least one AFL club, an increase of 1.34 million (+17.7%) on a year ago.*

*"Victoria's extended lockdowns during 2020, and again in 2021, have kept football fans watching games on the couch at home in the league's most important market. Now 7.58 million Australians watched an AFL match on TV in the last year – equivalent to 36% of all Australians aged 14+.*

*"The biggest winners in terms of increasing their support over the last year are unsurprisingly the clubs that have enjoyed success on the field in the 2020 and 2021 seasons as well as the two newest clubs in the AFL.*

*"Both of the Grand Finalists have seen a big uplift in support from a year ago led by the **Western Bulldogs**, up 89,000 (+44.5%) to a supporter base of 289,000 to be just behind their opponent this week at Perth Stadium, **Melbourne**, who lifted their support by 55,000 (+23.4%) to 290,000.*

*"There were also surges in support for two-time defending Premiers **Richmond** who increased their support by 113,000 (+25.3%) to 560,000. As well as having a fast-growing supporter base on the back of Premierships in 2017, 2019 and 2020, **Richmond** is also one of the best clubs at converting their supporters to members with a conversion rate of 18.8% delivering a total club membership of over 105,000 – a conversion rate second only to **North Melbourne**.*

*"Although neither club has managed to win through to a Grand Final in the last few years both the **Brisbane Lions** and **Port Adelaide** have finished top four in each of the last two years – and seen big increases in support on the back of excellent performances on the field.*

*"The **Brisbane Lions** added a competition leading 152,000 (+25.6%) supporters over the past year to draw level with the **West Coast Eagles** with 746,000 supporters in equal third place overall. **Port Adelaide** added 67,000 (+28.5%) supporters to reach 302,000 supporters in 2021.*

*"Although success is a big part of increasing support, there is also a benefit for clubs when top-level content is provided on a weekly, or even daily, basis for potential supporters. The **Gold Coast Suns** are the only AFL club never to play in a finals series but after two seasons with many extra AFL matches played in their home market the club has seen a big increase in support, up 46,000 (75%) to 112,000.*



*“The **GWS Giants** have enjoyed more success than their northern counterparts contesting five out of the last six finals series and winning at least one final in each of those five years, however they are yet to experience the ultimate success of winning a Premiership. Nevertheless, their consistent performances are being rewarded off the field with their supporter base increasing by 90,000 (+54.5%) to 255,000 – a new record high for the AFL’s youngest club.*

*“Looking forward the AFL will be hoping the 2022 season will not present as many challenges in putting on a regular season as we have seen in 2020-21. Although the last two years have been incredibly tough for the league the ability to find a way to keep the schedule rolling through the season despite the disruptions has been appreciated by millions of football supporters around Australia – including this one.*

*“The success of the AFL in building its supporter base during this period is a tribute to the strength, durability and agility of the code throughout a once-in-a-century pandemic.”*

**For comments or more information about Roy Morgan’s AFL Supporter profiles and other Sporting profiles data, please contact:**

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### **Related research findings**

View our extensive range of [Sport profiles and reports](#), including [Sports supporters](#), [AFL supporters](#), [NRL supporters](#), [Soccer supporters](#) and supporters of various AFL clubs including [Richmond](#), [Western Bulldogs](#), [Hawthorn](#), [Sydney Swans](#), [Adelaide Crows](#), [GWS Giants](#) as well as profiles on [Sporting participants](#) including [Australian Football participants](#) and [Sports viewers](#).

Compiled with data from Roy Morgan’s Single Source survey (the largest of its kind in the world, with 50,000 respondents p.a), these ready-made profiles provide a broad understanding of the target audience, in terms of demographics, attitudes, activities and media usage in Australia.

### **About Roy Morgan**

Roy Morgan is the largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state of Australia, as well as in the United States and the United Kingdom. A full service research organisation specialising in omnibus and syndicated data, Roy Morgan has over 75 years’ experience in collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

### **Margin of Error**

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2